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L E T T E R

AND

Q U E R I E S

TO

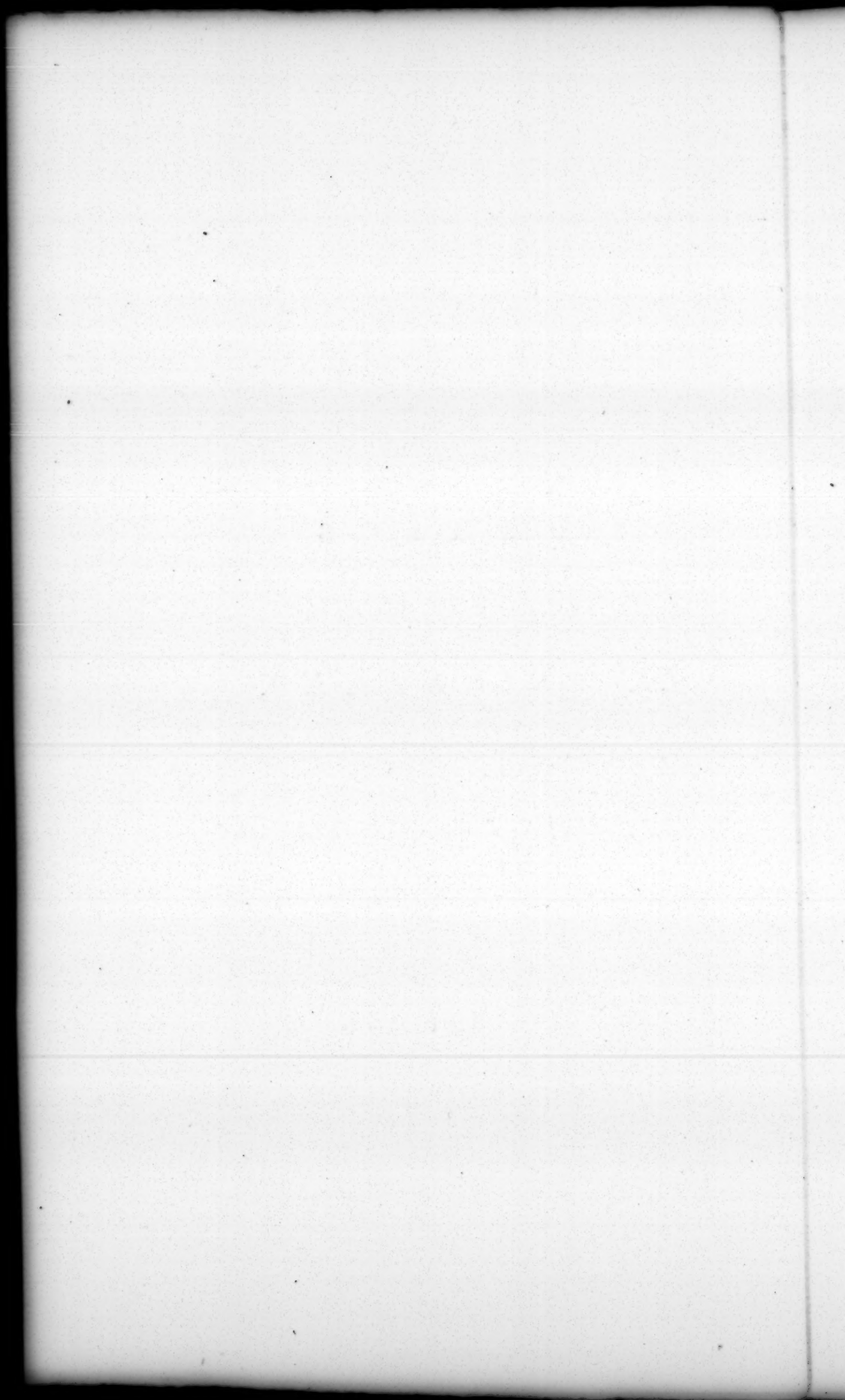
*Dr. PRIESTLEY,*

RELATIVE TO

The PRINCIPLE of the CORPORATION  
and TEST ACTS.

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[ Price ONE SHILLING. ]



L E T T E R

A N D

Q U E R I E S

T O

*Dr.* P R I E S T L E Y

Relative to the PRINCIPLES



The CORPORATION and TEST ACTS;

OCCASIONED BY

His S E R M O N, preached at *Birmingham*,

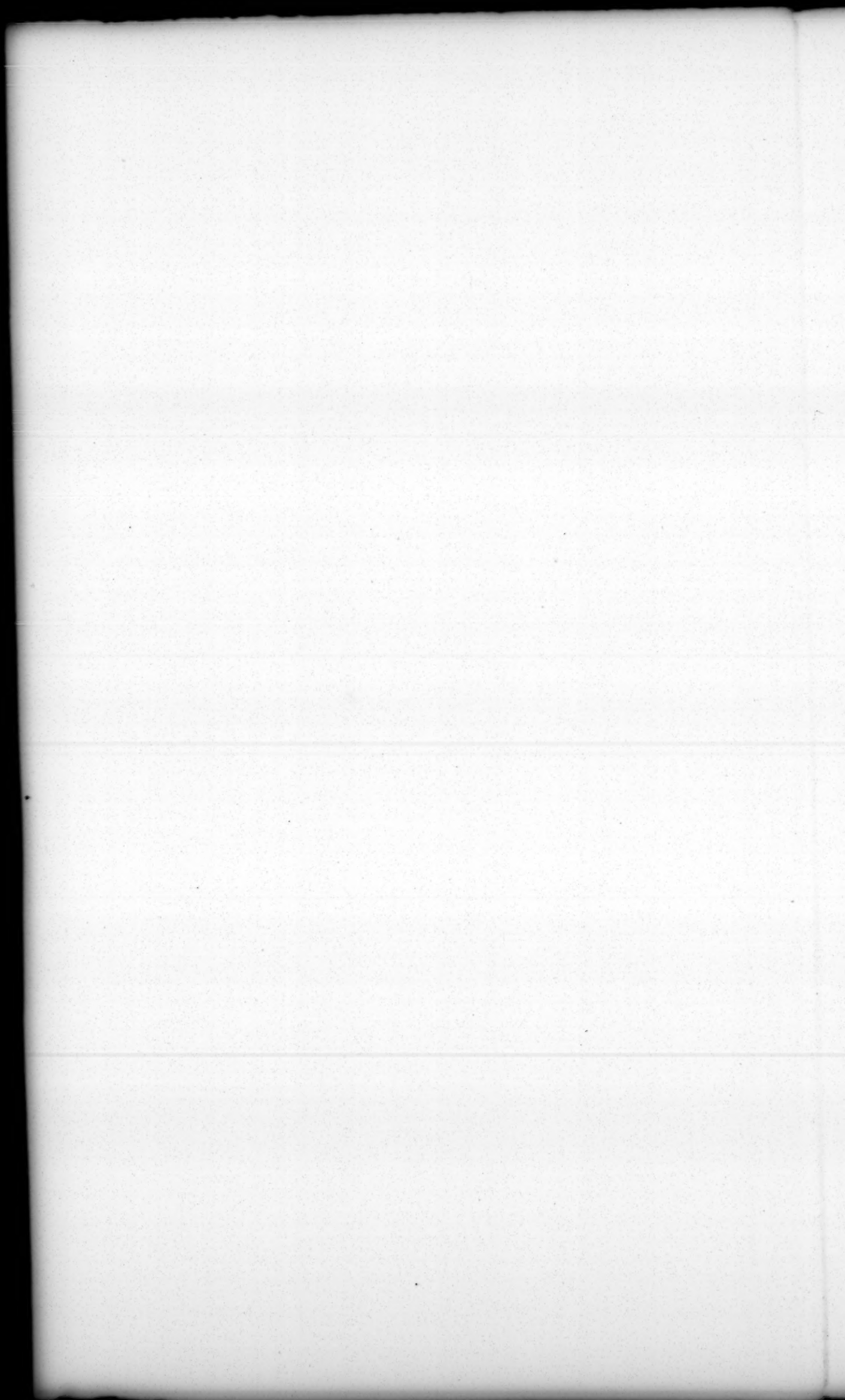
On the 5th of NOVEMBER, 1789.

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L E T T E R

T O

*Dr. PRIESTLEY.*

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S I R,

**Z**EAL for the Truth, rather than for any particular opinions, is a profession equally made on both sides by controversial writers in general; and on both sides, I think, liberal credit should be given to it: but though liberally given, it must not however be given altogether without reserve. All men, I presume, feel a self-complacency in the event of every disquisition, when they find their preconceptions justified by proof: and,

and, on the contrary, when they have flattered themselves that they were arrived at a certainty of knowledge, it cannot fail to be felt as some sort of mortification, if they should be forced to accept the scholar's part, in the very moment when they were seating themselves in the master's chair. Hence, it must often be expected, that the fantastic honours of science may get a temporary possession, at least, even of minds the most susceptible to the genuine charms of Truth : yet they who love her the best, will be the most jealous of this deceitfulness of their own imaginations, and will think no pains too great, nor any means too trivial or degrading, which may prove a guard against this common source of error. We may, however, almost venture to say, that all the care of this sort which can be taken, hath never yet been found of efficacy sufficient to induce any leader of a controversy to

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avow himself a convert to the more cogent arguments of an adversary. In a dispute concerning any matter of pretty general interest, it happens too, that the bye-standers are generally in so great a hurry to chuse a favourite, that the reasons on both sides are the least thing attended to. Each party salutes its own champion with the pæans of victory; but who hath really the advantage, remains as much a question at the close of the day, as it was before the fight began: so that the contest ends with no better effect, than to leave the minds of the disputants themselves, and of their respective adherents, exasperated against each other; while the cooler and more dispassionate spectators often find it so difficult to form their judgment, as to make them think it hardly worth while to enquire, what the fair state of the question may be—what the principles, equally admitted by both parties, or peculiar to either—

either—and how far these are to be received as self-evident, or proved, or capable of proof.

Thus zeal for the truth ends where it began—in mere profession: the learned opponents remain confirmed more than ever in their opposite and contradictory opinions; and, what is still more deplorable, the world has gained but little in point of knowledge, while it hath lost a great deal in the more important virtue of charity, through that natural infection of passion, which every mortal man is subject to, in some degree or other.

I have sometimes thought, that this evil might admit of remedy, if it were established as a fundamental law of controversy, that whenever any one hath possessed himself of any subject, in the capacity of a teacher of  
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it, either in whole or in part, he should be entitled to have and to hold the same, until he himself should think proper to relinquish it. But as every one who undertakes the office of an instructor, is, on his part, bound to condescend to those, who are willing to learn of him, in such manner as may be necessary to explain to them both his first principles, and his deductions from them; I apprehend that he should not find cause of offence in any question that can be put to him, fairly relative to his doctrine; nor should be above replying fairly and directly to it; as fairly and directly, as he would be bound to do, if under examination upon his oath. The petulance of persons under prejudices, which he hath undertaken to remove, should have no influence on him, seated on the pinnacle of science, in the calm and unclouded regions of Truth: If, however, from the course of the enquirer's que-

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sions, the master should suspect him to be under the dominion of false principles, which made him incapable of receiving the truth, he ought to have the privilege, whenever he thinks proper, after replying to his pupil's demands, to seat the ignorant person in his own place, and himself to take the questioning part; in order to discover exactly what those false principles are, which have this perverse effect, and to convince him, who holds them, of his error.

In this manner, I think, the ignorant could hardly fail of instruction, as far as their capacity for receiving it, might extend; nor the learned of discovering, at least, what was that difference in their principles, which might render it impossible for them to come to the same conclusions. But a further great advantage of this method would be, that no man would be able to fix on an adversary  
any

any principle, or any consequence to be drawn from his principles, which he himself might not be willing to allow ; and thus the practice of making objections for an opponent in one's own way, for the sake of answering them again after one's own fashion, would be entirely abolished : nor could any controversy be followed by the mob, for the mere diversion of seeing what hard blows were given and received on both sides.—Whoever might be inclined to bear a part in the enquiry in hand, must needs bring a calm and attentive mind to the debate, to hear and understand what should be said on one side, as well as on the other ; and every person who came not thus prepared, would soon find, that he could have no temptation to remain ; as the matter must of necessity be as unintelligible to him, as if it were to be discussed in an unknown tongue. Thus Truth might be pursued with equal

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freedom, without that rancour and ill-will which can never properly belong to the honourable rivals for the possession of so divine a mistress: nor would the unthankful multitude turn again, and rend their teachers, for scattering among them the precepts of a wisdom, too precious and too sublime for all to be alike prepared to receive it.

I have been led into these reflections by the perusal of a late publication of your's, not very voluminous indeed, but perhaps of no less importance than many of your larger and more elaborate works; being a Sermon delivered by you, professedly to instruct your brother-dissenters in the conduct they ought to observe, in order to procure the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, and sanctioned by a committee whom it should seem you have empowered to act, in some sort, for you as a body.

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The subject is certainly of very great national importance, and deserves the attentive consideration of every man who values the religion or the laws of his country, or who thinks they may have any necessary or eventual relation to each other. Yet every man may not have so comprehensive a view of it, as to be satisfied what part he ought to take, and what are the principles on which he ought to govern his own conduct, and endeavour to influence that of others. Of this number, Sir, perhaps I may be reckoned to be one; and I have thought that I could not apply to any better instructor than yourself, who have told us, that “*the security of yourself and your brethren, and of your cause, is to arise from your enlightening the minds of your countrymen* \*.”

A direct answer from you to some questions which your discourse has suggested,  
I flatter

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 12.

I flatter myself, will tend extremely to *enlighten my mind*;—the minds of many more of our countrymen may at the same time derive equal benefit; and should you find, by experiment, that this mode of instruction is generally serviceable to your cause in this instance, you may perhaps have opportunities of applying it with equal success in others: at any rate, I trust it can be of no disservice to the cause of Truth and common sense; and if you should, at any future time, think my instruction might proceed better, by examining into the state of my opinions, than by the explanation of your own, I shall be ready to answer any enquiries on that subject, with all ingenuousness. In the mean time, if in the process of my enquiries, I seem to misapprehend your doctrines on this important subject of Religion and Politics, I hope you will have the goodness to set me right.

The

The dissenters, as I understand Dr. Priestley, found their demand for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, *not on favour, but on a natural inherent right* \*: that right is, they say, infringed by these acts, which are therefore an *oppression, injustice, and persecution* † exercised against them by the established church. All this is taken for granted throughout Dr. Priestley's discourse; wherein I find nothing that has so much the appearance of an argument to prove this *infringement of right*, as where he says, *that it must be unjust that the dissenters should be subjected to any penalty, unless it can be shown that they have been guilty of some offence* ‡.

I understand from Dr. P. himself, that it is not allowed on the other side, that injustice

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 15.

† See ditto, p. 4. 11, 12, &c.

‡ Ditto, p. 5.

tice is committed against any one by these Acts. Nay, *that a great majority of the nation do not know of any such injustice; and that if they knew it, they would heartily join in redressing it* \*: I have further heard it argued, that what Dr. Priestley and his brethren call a *penalty*, is really *no penalty*; and that it is not the object of the above-mentioned laws to punish any *offence* committed; that the Acts are merely *precautionary Acts*, to keep Dr. Priestley and his brethren out of situations, where they might be tempted to commit *offence* in numberless ways, for which the law can no otherwise provide, but by taking care that they shall not be exposed to the temptation, nor furnished with the means and opportunity of committing it.

*Quere 1st.* I beg Dr. Priestley to inform me, in the first place, if he allows this to be

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 14.

be a fair general state of the question, respecting which he proposes to *enlighten our minds* \* ?

2d. Is it any part of the business of the legislature to judge of the qualifications necessary for the magistracy? or is this the business of any body, or of nobody?

3d. Is religion, in any sort, a qualification; and profaneness, a disqualification?

4th. Is there any other proper judge of religion, as a qualification for the magistracy, but the legislature, and such officers as are legally empowered to judge thereof?

5th. Doth the legislature infringe any natural inherent right in any man, by declaring certain qualifications in every man alike

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 12.

necessary to his exercising, or holding, any particular office of public trust?

6th. Hath any man any natural inherent right to any office of public trust, independent of the laws of his country?

7th. A man shall not be judge in his own cause—a wife shall not be admitted evidence against her husband.—Doth Dr. Priestley consider these disqualifications, in the light of *penalties*, and the consequence of *offences* committed by the disqualified parties? Or is the declaration of these disqualifications, an infringement of any natural inherent right?

8th. Does Dr. Priestley really believe, that the life we are now living in this world is intended as a preparation for another? and that our eternal happiness and misery in the  
next

next life, will be determined by the habits of religion and virtue, or by those of impiety and vice, which have been acquired here?

9th. Does Dr. Priestley think, that the institutions of civil government have any natural tendency to promote or to discourage habits of this sort? and if they have, is it, in any sort, the duty of the legislature, *on this account*, to make it the object of the public institutions to encourage and promote true religion and virtue, on the one hand, and to discountenance and discourage impiety and vice, on the other? Or does Dr. Priestley think, that the religious and moral habits of the individual—the order of civil society—and the happiness and misery of another life—are all separate and distinct things, without relation, or connexion of any kind?

10th. Is there either *oppression, injustice, or persecution*, in excluding from the exercise of the public authority, persons, who in the opinion of the legislature, and a great majority of the community, would be liable to abuse their trust, to the purposes of propagating error, or obscuring the truths of religion? the same persons, however, being at the same time equally protected in their persons and properties with the rest of their fellow-subjects—their errors borne with, and tolerated to the utmost extent which, it is thought, mere tenderness of conscience can possibly require, or which can consist with the security of the established religion?

11th. Are not the bounds of the magistrate's authority, with respect to religion, strictly defined by the legislature in this country? and is not his exercise of that authority

rity continually subject to the revision and controul of the courts of justice?

12th. Does Dr. Priestley think, that a member of the legislature, who sincerely believes in the being and moral government of God, ought to concur in committing the people to the care of an atheist magistrate?

13th. Does Dr. Priestley think, that a member of the legislature, who believes in a divine revelation, as absolutely necessary to save men from vice, irreligion, and all the grossest corruptions of human nature in this life, and from eternal misery hereafter, ought to concur, in committing the people, in any degree he could avoid, to the care of magistrates whom he believed to be grossly ignorant of the revealed will of God, and eagerly bent to decry many of the most important doctrines of revelation; while other persons, whom

whom he judged competently instructed in, and well disposed to the truth, were to be found to accept the trust ?

14th. Does Dr. Priestley think, that in a Christian country, it is at all expedient that the magistrate should be a Christian, rather than a Jew, a Mahometan, a heathen, or an atheist ?

15th. Does Dr. Priestley think it possible, that the legislature, in a Christian country, can be indifferent to all religions, and all sects ?—Can it regard the people, in no degree, as having an interest in a life to come, and the happiness or misery of that life to come, as totally independent and unconnected with the administration of the magistrate in his office ? And does Dr. Priestley assert, that the legislature transgresses the bounds of its *proper duty*, whenever it pays any attention

tention to religion, and does not strictly confine itself *to guard the lives and properties only of all the citizens* \* ?

16th. Upon this principle laid down by Dr. Priestley, is it not demonstrable, that no person can be qualified to bear a part in the supreme legislative body, but an Atheist? Would Dr. Priestley wish for a Test Act, to enforce this desirable object?

17th. Does Dr. Priestley disclaim all human authority in matters of *state*, as well as *religion* †; inasmuch as the object of the Corporation and Test Acts is to specify certain conditions as necessary qualifications for the magistracy, and other public offices?

18th. Does Dr. Priestley think, that every man, in every community, should be the  
judge

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 12. † Ditto, p. 14.

judge of his own talents, ability, and qualifications, for every place and situation in that community ; and of right, ought to be admitted to places of trust, power, and authority, upon his own judgment of himself? For example, does Dr. Priestley think, that the poor negroes are as admissible to the magistracy, as the dissenters themselves \*?

19th. Will Dr. Priestley be so good as to give us some instances of civil governments existing without any established religion ; without regard, or care, or attention to any religion ; since he asserts, that the civil magistrate should be without any of these †?

20th. Does Dr. Priestley acknowledge Christianity to be any part of the constitution,

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 15. † Ditto, p. 12.

tion, as settled at the revolution (by Christianity, I here mean those articles of faith, which Dr. Priestley is pleased to give his sanction to, as common to all Christians\*)? and may dissenters from any of these, in the opinion of Dr. Priestley, be admitted to the magistracy, consistently with the constitution?

21st. May not the Mahometans be reckoned Christians, according to Dr. Priestley's enumeration of the articles of the Christian faith †?

22d. Dr. Priestley founds a claim of merit on behalf of the dissenters, on *their being well affected to the constitution, as it was settled at the revolution* ‡. But he seems to

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 14.

† Ibidem.

‡ See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 5.

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contend \*, either that there is no such thing as he hath before called *the constitution* ; or that it is a thing of so fixed and permanent a nature, that it remains essentially the same, in spite of all changes in the laws. In the first case, he is desired to explain the merit of being well affected to a non-entity ; in the second, to define what we are to understand the constitution to be.

23d. Let Dr. Priestley declare explicitly what the constitution is : Whether the established church is, or is not any part of it, or ever was so : particularly, whether it was so at the revolution.—or at his present Majesty's coronation—or when it ceased to be a part of the constitution ?

24th. Dr. Priestley speaks of the dissenters as *a body* : will he be so good as to explain wherein

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 8.

wherein their *corporate capacity* consists \*? Can it consist in their being *dissenters*?—that is to say, can *dissention* be considered as a principle of *union*?

25th. Dr. Priestley says, that the *dissenters*, as a body, are unquestionably as good members of society, as any other part of the community †. What society does Dr. Priestley mean? does he mean as good members of the Christian church? If he does, will he say whether I, who believe in the divinity of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST, as expressly asserted by himself, and who believe every thing he uttered, to be oracular and infallible—and another person, who believes the same Jesus to have been a mere man, and not infallible, can be equally good members of the Christian church; that is to say, equally attached to Christ's church, and to him?

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 5.

† Ibidem.

26th. Does Dr. Priestley mean, that the dissenters of all descriptions, inhabiting Great Britain, are equally good members of the great political society, composed of all the various inhabitants of the realm, as the members of the established church of England, or the members of the established church of Scotland? Both of which churches are solemnly acknowledged by the laws of the land—both sworn to be maintained by his Majesty at his coronation—both admitted as constituent parts of the constitution of the united kingdoms.

27th. Will Dr. Priestley be so good as to tell us, not only what is the whole of that relief which the dissenters solicit, but likewise the whole of that MUCH MORE *which they are fully entitled to* \*?

28th. Can Dr. Priestley give any security  
of

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 5.

that what may come up to the expectations of one class of dissenters, in respect to toleration, will be finally satisfactory to them all?

29th. Can Dr. Priestley give any security to the members of the established church, that the dissenters will ever be as ready to grant the same plenary indulgence to them, when *no religion* shall be sanctioned by the law of the land, as he now claims for dissenters of all sorts and descriptions?

30th. Doth *a state of peace and liberty, for which a man cannot be too thankful to God\**, differ only, in degree, from the severest persecution †?

31st. Is not the principle of the Corporation and Test Acts purely defensive, *i. e.* to exclude

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 9.

† Ditto, p. 11.

exclude from power persons who, we think, cannot be trusted with it consistently with our safety? And is not the principle of persecution purely offensive; obliging men, under *real pains and penalties*, to profess what they do not believe? and are these two principles the same?

32d. If any man think them the same, if he think that to be refused the magistracy and public emoluments, is to be *oppressed and made a slave*, is there any other reasonable satisfaction to be given to such a one, than to leave him free to retire with his property, and without injury to his person, whither he will?

33d. May not the established church, and established government, with more propriety, consider as seditious, the pertinacious renewal of complaints, repeatedly adjudged in  
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the constitutional forms to be unreasonable ; than the dissenters represent as persecution\*, an exclusion from places of trust and power, on account of opinions which a great majority of the community have resolved to be a disqualification ?

34th. Is not the temper, with which this vexatious pertinacity is still borne, some instance of forbearance and charity? and may not these be considered, in some sort, as marks of the Truth ?

35th. Will not Jews, Mahometans, Heathens and Atheists, rank as dissenters, equally with any of the sectaries enumerated by Dr. Priestley? (p. 14.) Must not Dr. Priestley acknowledge all the infidels to be included in his sense of the word *dissenters*; since *to be a dissenter, Dr. Priestley does not think it necessary*

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 11 & 14.

*cessary to come under any denomination at all \*?*

35th. Does Dr. Priestley seriously believe, or intend seriously to make others believe, that *the honour of our country*† is concerned in being governed by him and his brethren, or at least in being prepared to receive so great a blessing!—that our refusing to be so prepared, is *ingratitude and injustice*‡ to those public-spirited dissenters, who are so ready to take this trouble for us; and who really do take the trouble they are now taking, *for our sakes*||;—that *the great majority of the nation, who do not know that they are guilty of any injustice to Dr. Priestley and his brethren, and who, if they did know it, would heartily join in redressing it, remain under a misapprehension in this respect, from gross ignorance and blindness*§?

37th. Does

\* See Dr. Priestley's Serm. p. 14. † Ditto, p. 13 & 15.

‡ Ditto, p. 14. || Ditto, p. 15. § Ditto, p. 12 & 13.

37th. Does Dr. Priestley really think, that no provision is to be made by the legislature for the instruction of the people in religion and virtue, till *he* is sufficiently taught, to be appointed a minister of the church established by law? Or does he really conceive that he is *oppressed in receiving no emolument appointed for the ministers of the church established by law*\*, while he cannot do the duty, for which their wages is appointed them?

38th. Does Dr. Priestley know, that one of the purposes for which that money is raised for the support of the ministers of the established church, to which he is by law obliged to contribute, is *his* instruction? And is it any sufficient reason for an exemption from the common charge, that he will not, or cannot learn?

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 4 & 5.

39th. If money were to be raised by one general tax throughout the kingdom, for the special purpose of paying the judges, and other officers of justice, or for embodying and training the militia, according to a system of tactics approved and established by the legislature, would Dr. Priestley demand an exemption from this tax, in behalf of himself and his brethren, under the pretence that they were made to contribute to the expence of the administration of justice, or to the defence of the realm, while they were excluded from the emoluments of both those departments in the state; if the case should prove, that they were therefore only excluded, because they would not, perhaps that they could not, act in either, according to the law of the land?

40th. If, for the sake of my children and family, and of the example I thought my  
station

station in life required from me, I were to make it a rule to keep no servant who did not regularly receive the communion of the holy sacrament, at the three great festivals every year, in the parish church, would Dr. Priestley call it *oppression* or *injustice*? And can any good reason be given, why the legislature may not exercise the same authority, in the choice of the servants of the public, as every master of a family must be allowed to have a right to use, in hiring his domestics?

41st. Does Dr. Priestley assert, either as a moralist or divine, *That it is the duty of every man to obtain for himself all the power and all the emoluments of public office he can, by every means not unlawful*; while without either, he confesses *himself to enjoy a state of peace and liberty*; and that in a degree, for which he cannot be too thankful to God\*?

Lastly,

\* See Dr. Priestley's Sermon, p. 9 & 10.

Lastly, Doth it not behove Dr. Priestley, and his brethren, to give an *immediate, direct, and consistent* answer to these Queries, or to abandon their pretence of *justice*? And if they do not, or cannot, give such an answer, may not the advocates of the Establishment fairly conclude, that the claim of the dissenters to relief, and their complaints of ill-usage from their country, on the subject of the Corporation and Test Acts, are no better than the *claims of STURDY BEGGARS*, and the *complaints of IMPOSTORS*?

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S I R,

Y O U R's, &c. &c.

